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STATE PASS TO ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE; OAU COLLECTIVE

SENSITIVE  
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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LADIES IN WHITE TO CINDY SHEEHAN: VISIT A CUBAN PRISON

¶1. (U) Summary: Cuba's "Ladies in White," relatives of political prisoners, have written to visiting American anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan and urged her to stop by a Cuban prison during her time on the island. Sheehan and other activists arrived in Havana on January 6 with plans to march to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo, to call for its closure. In a two-page letter, the Ladies criticize the wretched conditions at Cuban prisons, state that they have suffered intense harassment from the Cuban Government, and call on Sheehan to learn about "another reality" in Cuba. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On January 8, the Ladies in White showed us a letter they wrote the previous day to Cindy Sheehan. The letter starts by expressing sympathy to Sheehan over the loss of her son in Iraq. It states that the Ladies "feel the pain profoundly, because our sons, husbands, brothers and uncles are held unjustly in terrible Cuban prisons, simply for trying to exercise their right to free expression, and to peacefully contribute to the well-being of the Cuban people." The Ladies in White, winners of the European Parliament's 2005 Sakharov Prize, wrote that when Sheehan and her colleagues are marching toward the Guantanamo base, they will be only a few miles from the Guantanamo Provincial Prison. The latter is home to "peaceful and defenseless political prisoners (who) suffer from inhumane conditions, without clean drinking water, with inadequate food, deficient medical care, insects, rodents" and other woes.

¶3. (U) The Ladies noted that a majority of their imprisoned loved ones are held far from home, complicating family contact. The letter says that because the Ladies continue to demand the immediate release of political prisoners, the GOC has carried out a repressive campaign against them and their families since March 2003. Repressive measures have included "acts of repudiation," systematic visits by State Security officials to Ladies' homes, and the blocking of the Ladies' free movement.

¶4. (U) The letter, respectful but assertive, ends by inviting Sheehan to learn about another reality of Cuban society. "We exhort you to visit Cuban prisons, chosen at random, and not one prepared by the Cuban authorities. And above all, visit the Guantanamo Provincial Prison."

¶5. (SBU) Comment: We have nothing to add. The Ladies' letter speaks for itself.

